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Surgical Limits: The Life of Gordon Murray

Shelley McKellar

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Surgical Limits: The Life of Gordon Murray Shelley McKellar

Shelley McKellar's *Surgical Limits* chronicles the life of one of Canada's most prominent and controversial surgeons, Gordon Murray (1894-1976). McKellar examines candidly and critically the career successes and failures of Gordon Murray, discussing Murray's surgical ingenuity and skill, and how he saved numerous lives through his advances in heart and vascular surgery, his experimental cancer treatment, and his development of a kidney dialysis machine. She also chronicles the 1967 spinal cord controversy, in which he claimed to have reversed paralysis, and the resulting theatrics surrounding the apparent recovery from paralysis of Bertrand Proulx. Murray's determination to challenge the limits of surgery and medicine, McKellar argues, produced noteworthy clinical accomplishments yet also ultimately led to the fall of his career through hubris, poor judgement and his perception of persecution from his colleagues.

McKellar skilfully blends a discussion of Murray's personal and professional life with a cogent analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of his research. At the same time, the biography extends beyond the individual surgeon to larger issues relating to the limits of surgery, the modern medical research endeavour, the surgical character and culture, and the rising power and authority of the surgeon. By presenting the controversial figure of Gordon Murray within the context of the development of Canadian medicine and surgical practices, McKellar's exceptional biography of an extraordinary surgeon makes a major contribution to the history of modern surgery.

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